



# Junior League Puts Their Money Where Their Heart Is

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*Local women support youth center*

By VICKI BENNINGTON

The women of Junior League of Greater Alton know a good thing when they see it – and a safe, place for area youth to kick up their heels is a place they see as nothin’ but a good thing – in so many ways.

The organization recently donated \$4,000 to the Riverbender.com Community Center, and several members have already invested time as volunteers on the advisory board and at various events, with plans to lend a hand when and where needed throughout the year.

In March, the Alton chapter of Junior League selected the Riverbender.com Community Center as one of its six projects for the year. Yearly projects sometimes involve a cash donation, service work, or a combination of both, said Treasurer Laura Shansey, who is in her 11th year as a member of the group.

“We particularly like to focus on providing services to children of our community,” Shansey said. “We work with schools and advocacy groups that help kids with need, but we don’t often get the chance to be involved with the teen market.

“The community center gives us the chance to do that,” she added. “We see the potential for growing a real partnership with Riverbender.”

The second large project of the year is a \$4,000 donation to the “All God’s Children Shall Have Shoes” program, involving many area schools. School nurses select children

in need of new shoes, who are then bussed to Pay Less Shoe Source in November and December where the children may each choose a new pair of shoes and socks.

The league is also lending their support to the Madison County Child Advocacy Center with a \$2,000 project, where members coordinate the purchase of needed items at the center and make a cash donation of the remaining funds.

“Riverbend Head Start and Family Services is a project with a \$500 budget, where we collect gently-used coats in October and donate them along with the cash funds for the purchase of more,” Shansey said. “We also assist with the silent auction at the organization’s annual gala.”

Projects that primarily involve volunteer time include the “Kids In The Kitchen” initiative where members man a booth at Alton Square Mall during “Meet the Character” events. Members share nutritional information with children and parents, and this year the project is expanding into several elementary schools where league volunteers will hold health fairs, discussing healthy food choices, serving size, label reading and exercise. Shansey said there are tentative plans to bring “Kids in The Kitchen” to the community center as well.

Overall community outreach encompasses several smaller projects – ringing bells for the Salvation Army; the Adopt-A-Block Program - once a month cleaning the league’s designated area, participating in the all-city cleanup Oct. 2, and teaming with Friends of Haskell to raise funds for restoring the Lucy Haskell Playhouse. A year-round gently used book drive is designed to benefit children. **Books appropriate for children 6 months through high school age can be dropped off at the office of Dr. Stephanie Monroe, River Bend Chiropractic at 3302 Godfrey Road, where** Junior League fund-raising cookbooks are also being sold for \$10. In addition, cookbooks are available at **State Street Market at 208 State Street.**

Other fund-raising initiative include Charleston Wraps wrapping paper and gift catalog sales, and the two biggest events - the Red and White Gala held in February or March, consisting of a dinner and silent auction held at Lockhaven Country Club that raised \$6,500 last year. The group also hosts the Ham O’Shanter Golf Tournament in May at Spencer T. Olin Golf Course, raising \$3,800 at last year’s event.

“Another important aspect of Junior League is training women in the community to be leaders,” Shansey said. “Members frequently attend organizational and developmental training opportunities. They then use their skills through things like parent or church groups, and many go on to serve on community and non-profit boards of directors.

“And we all learn internally how to be better servers of others,” she said.

While core membership generally consists of women from about 20 to 50 years old, there are many sustainers who continue membership, providing support by remaining active or through monetary donations, including Marjorie DuVivier who has been involved since the local group's incorporation in 1952.

Junior League was founded in 1901 by Mary Harriman. There are now more than 160,000 women in 292 leagues in the U.S., Canada, Mexico and the United Kingdom.

*Photo on right:* Junior League members of Greater Alton participated in a 'Kids in The Kitchen' event, providing healthy recipes and nutritional information along with exercise demonstrations in conjunction with Alton Square Mall's 'Meet the Character' event. *From left front,* Tina Murphy, Cami Giertz, Mackenzie Giertz, Cali Giertz and Laura Hill; *from back left,* Kelly Schwegel, Jill Vinyard-King, Laura Shansey, and *back right,* Melissa Bell, Heather Hendricks and Clare Clancy.